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SUBJECT: TAIWAN'S HUGE HAKKA POPULATION MUCH SOUGHT AFTER
BY POLITICIANS OF ALL STRIPES

Classified By: Political Section Chief Dave Rank for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Taiwan's political narrative long has centered on relations between mainland Chinese who fled here with the Kuomintang (KMT) in the 1940s and the island's Hoklo majority, whose ancestors migrated from southern Fujian province generations earlier. That analysis, however, fails to account for the Hakkas, a linguistically and culturally distinctive group that first came to Taiwan from China centuries ago and now make up nearly one-fifth of the island's population. The Hakkas have emerged as an important political force and are wooed by national and local politicians alike, most recently in the run-up to December 5 elections for county and city leaders. Although they don't vote as a solid block, Hakkas historically have trended toward the KMT, particularly in northern Taiwan where most of them live, while being skeptical of Taiwan independence as promoted by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). They generally are comfortable with the status quo, and therefore act as an important brake against the more extreme proponents of either reunification or independence. End summary.

THE HAKKAS FIND A HOME IN TAIWAN ...

¶2. (SBU) Other than a very small aborigine population, the people of Taiwan often are seen as falling into one of two groups. First are the Hoklo, who account for most of the island's 23 million people. Their ancestors came here centuries ago from Fujian province across the Taiwan Strait, and they continue to speak a dialect similar to that of southern Fujian. Supporters of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party come primarily from this group. Second are the so-called "outsiders" (waishengren) from elsewhere in China who fled to Taiwan in the late 1940s with KMT Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. They generally speak Mandarin and traditionally have backed closer ties with China and, at least in theory, have not forsaken the eventual goal of reunification. Over the years the KMT has aggressively recruited the Hoklo, also called Minnanren, who hold many key positions in the party and the government.

¶3. (SBU) The main problem with that dichotomous analysis is the failure to account for the Hakka population, whose ancestors fled to Taiwan and other relatively safe havens around the world during times of chaos within mainland China, such as the 17th Century overthrow of the Ming dynasty. "We're the Jews of the Chinese," proclaimed Liu Tung-Lung, Deputy Minister of the Executive Yuan Council for Hakka Affairs. According to the council, the Hakka now account for roughly 4.3 million people on Taiwan, or about 19% of the population. The Council's main task is to promote the use of the Hakka language, which Liu said is spoken by about 2.8 million people here, and other aspects of Hakka culture. Visitors to Liu's office get parting gifts that showcase the

Council's work: a Hakka language textbook and accompanying CDs, a DVD of a Hakka-language movie, and the otherwise hard-to-find "Jazz Hakka 2009" CD, including standards such as Afternoon Tree featuring Toshi, Mountain and Annie.

14. (SBU) The most hallowed ground for Taiwan's Hakka is the sprawling Yimin Temple just outside Hsinchu City. The temple marks the burial spot of some 200 Hakka heroes who were killed fighting a rebel army of Hoklo at the end of the 18th century. Emperor Qianlong sent a plaque in his own calligraphy honoring the loyalty of the defenders, a replica of which has pride of place in the temple's main hall. Temple caretaker Lin Bang-Hsiung, his face marked by a mole on his right cheek from which several strands of white hair protrude, said more than 500,000 people visit annually during the peak Chinese New Year season. The crowds include top leaders, and the temple walls are adorned with photos of visits by former Presidents Lee Teng-hui of the KMT and Chen Shui-bian of the DPP. Lin, who traces his Hakka ancestors back 23 generations, the last seven of which lived on Taiwan, said President Ma Ying-jeou has made the pilgrimage as well. "They come to attract votes," said Lin. Ma's electioneering doesn't stop with temple visits; he attended a gala Hakka awards dinner in September where he gave a five-minute speech in Hakka and promised a 27 percent increase in the budget of the Council for Hakka Affairs. In November, with local elections less than a month away, he further promised to double the Council's budget within four years. The president, noted Liu, also claimed to be descended from a famous Hakka general.

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... AND BECOME AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL FACTOR...

15. (C) While wooing Hakkas is a fixture for presidential races, it's even more important for local races in predominately Hakka areas. In Hsinchu County, for example, more than two-thirds the population is Hakka, according to the Council. Both the DPP and KMT candidates for Hsinchu County magistrate are Hakka; an independent candidate who broke away from the KMT is not, but she stresses the fact that her husband and her most important supporter, the outgoing Hsinchu magistrate, both are. The KMT candidate, Chiu Ching-chun, in particular has made his connections to Hakka communities around the world an important campaign issue. His name card identifies him as chairman of the World Hakka Association, and he says he will attract international Hakka investment to Hsinchu should he be elected magistrate. "They will all want to come here and invest because they trust me," he told PolOffs. To underscore the importance of tapping into the Hakka diaspora, Chiu during campaign appearances whips out of his wallet a 25-rupee note from Mauritius that bears the portrait of Sir Moilin Jean Ah-Chuen, a Hakka businessman and parliamentarian from the tiny Indian Ocean island.

16. (C) As he predicted the "vast majority" of Hakkas would vote for him, Chiu tapped with his finger the KMT emblem on the breast of his campaign vest. He, like most other officials and politicians PolOff interviewed, argued that Hakkas tended to vote for the KMT for a variety of reasons. Chiu argued the KMT always had taken care of the Hakkas. (Note: A campaign aide for the DPP candidate made the same point in a different way -- Hakkas didn't support the KMT as much as they liked Sun Yat-sen, the father of modern China whose portrait graces Taiwan currency. End note.) Several people, including Chuang Ying-Chang, dean of the College of Hakka Studies at National Chiao Tung University in Hsinchu, noted that Hakkas typically were a minority population and therefore remained loyal to their rulers, which for most of the past-half century have been the KMT on Taiwan, as their protectors.

¶7. (C) Many argued that Hakka typically were more comfortable with the KMT's goal of strengthening relations with mainland China than with the DPP's pro-independence policy. One reason is that familial ties continued to link Hakkas on Taiwan with the mainland. Professor Chuang said some Hakka here still sent money back to relatives on the mainland; in return, they received peanuts and other local products. Lineage halls where Hakka pay respect to their mainland ancestors remain common in some Taiwan villages. Meanwhile, many Hakka are uncomfortable whenever the Taiwan independence movement is closely identified with the Hoklo and their language, as has often been the case.

¶8. (C) Still, the DPP has made some inroads among the Hakka. Professor Chuang estimated that perhaps 30 percent of Hakkas now supported the DPP, up from 10 percent in the past, although he cautioned that this did not necessarily translate into backing for independence. One reason for the increased support, he said, was a number of actions taken by former President Chen Shui-bian to promote Hakka culture. During Chen's administration, the first Hakka television station went on the air and the Council for Hakka Affairs was established, as was Chuang's own College of Hakka Studies. The DPP in general fares better in southern Taiwan, and the minority of Hakka who live there tend to be more supportive of the opposition party as well. Liu Jui-nan, the KMT secretary general for Taoyuan County in northern Taiwan, noted that in a few local Hakka-dominated townships his party also typically lost to the DPP.

...YET NOT QUITE A POLITICAL MOVEMENT

¶9. (C) For all the efforts to strengthen Hakka identity, no serious Hakka-based political movement has emerged. A candidate from the recently formed Hakka Party is running for magistrate in Taoyuan County, which has the largest Hakka population of any county or city with about 730,000. The party, with 2,000 members in the county, is tiny; when PolOff visited the candidate's headquarters it was hardly abuzz with activity. The candidate, Wu Fu-tung, is a veterinarian and novice politician who in an interview with PolOff had trouble explaining how a campaign based on Hakka identity could appeal to a broader audience. Even his few campaign contributors seem a bit wary. On the walls of Wu's campaign headquarters are about 150 slips of red paper bearing the

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amounts of individual donations, typically ranging from NTD 3,000-5,000 (USD 93-156), but only the surnames of the contributors to protect their identity so as not to anger the more established parties.

COMMENT: HAKKA AS AN IMPORTANT MODERATING POLITICAL FACTOR

¶10. (C) The KMT and DPP assiduously woo Hakka voters, who tend to identify with the more moderate factions of the two major parties. As Liu of the Council for Hakka Affairs noted, Hakkas typically neither aggressively advocate reunification with China nor do they aggressively support Taiwan independence. Instead, they reflect mainstream public opinion by favoring the status quo in which Taiwan maintains its de facto autonomy without formally declaring independence. In so doing, they represent a key stabilizing force in Taiwan politics. In recognition of their political importance, AIT plans to expand on its recent steps to broaden its contacts with the Hakka community.

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